

# Motorized access to conservation area being cut off

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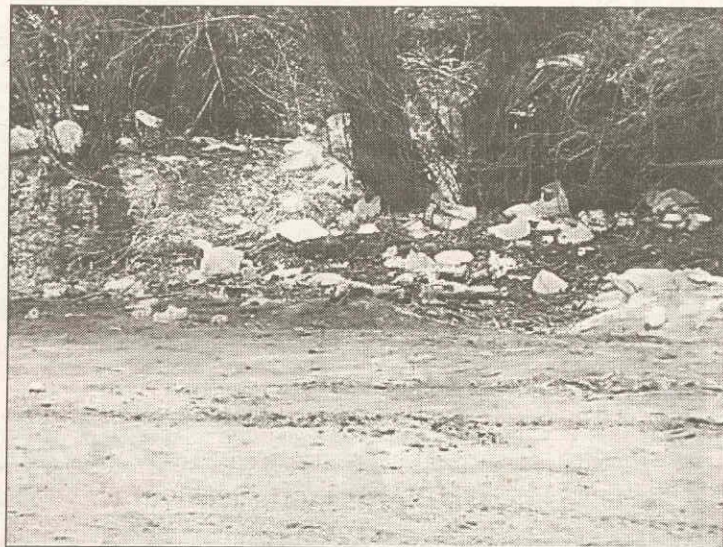
Officials want to clamp down on illegal dumping, target shooting and scarring of the ecosystem at Lake Pleasant Regional Park's Agua Fria conservation area.

Authorities on July 1 will begin enforcing a ban on motorized vehicles in the conservation area at the north end of the park, just south of Table Mesa Road. Violators will be cited and face possible fines.

"We are not shutting it down," said Dawna Taylor, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department spokeswoman. "You can still fish, camp, hike and ride your bike back there and do some picnicking. We are just not allowing motorized vehicle access back there anymore."

All supplies will need to be carried into the site without the use of motorized vehicles.

The decision to enforce the park rule was made by the Maricopa County Parks and



MARICOPA COUNTY PARKS

The Agua Fria Conservation Area near Lake Pleasant will soon be off limits to motorized vehicles.

Recreation Department and Bureau of Reclamation and was not made lightly, said R.J. Cardin, assistant director for the county Parks and Recreation Department.

The conservation area

makes up about 2,405 acres of the park's 24,425 acres, said Patricia Cox, Bureau of Reclamation spokeswoman.

Taylor said the restriction was put in place in a 1995 park master plan but was not

enforced until now. The master plan also designed the conservation area after much public input.

"We have never seen problems ... until the past year or two," she said. "With everybody moving into the Valley, we are seeing an increased usage in the area."

The park is seeing an increase in foot traffic as development closes in on the outdoor recreation area, and that jump in traffic is spurring more problems.

Last year, the park recorded 443 watercraft and 2,685 autos that paid for entry to the Agua Fria conservation area, Taylor said.

A cleanup a couple of months ago resulted in 32 tons of trash hauled from the site, she said.

"We got people doing ATVs, off-highway vehicles, going back there tearing up the desert," she said. "Some are doing illegal shooting there. By removing the vehicles, which are not supposed to be there, it re-

moves the other activities from taking place.

"We want to make sure the public is safe as well as protect the environment."

The conservation area also experienced degradation of cultural sites, including petroglyphs that have been either damaged or stolen, open campfires and woodcutting.

A multi-agency task force led by the Bureau of Reclamation has been meeting to determine the best short- and long-term solutions for the area. BLM owns the land but the county manages it.

The Agua Fria Conservation Area was designated as a conservation area with limited access and development in order to preserve the riparian areas.

Taylor said public feedback is welcome, adding that the task force has no deadline to complete its work.

She said there was no time frame for when the task force would be completed with its work.